

The implementation of the modal meanings of the verb "should" in the context

Bondar, Oksana

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Bondar, O. (2015). The implementation of the modal meanings of the verb "should" in the context. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 64, 81-86. <https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ILSHS.64.81>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more Information see:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

The Implementation of the Modal Meanings of the Verb “Should” in the Context

BONDAR Oksana

Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University, Ukraine

e-mail address: obondar2005@ukr.net

Keywords: modal meanings, modality, subjective modality, extralinguistic factors, context.

ABSTRACT. The article is dedicated to the analysis of the modal meanings of the verb “should” and their implementation in a context. The purpose of the study is to determine the factors, both linguistic and extralinguistic, that influence and intensify the modal notions. The emotive and expressive modal meanings of “should infinitive” construction are described. The importance of correct interpretation and translation of the investigated structure is stressed.

1. INTRODUCTION

There has been tremendous interest in the category of modality among linguists for many decades. However, there still remain controversial issues relating to this category. The implementation of modal meanings in the language is a matter of a general problem of modality. The issue of modality implementation in the text has not been given a complete description in the linguistic literature. This is due to the complexity of interpretations of modality and modal meanings as part of the more general problem of universal categories. Nowadays, it is important to study linguistic and extralinguistic factors contributing to the implementation of subjective modality in the language.

In the linguistic literature the category of modality has been viewed from different perspectives. On the one hand, modality is considered to indicate the range of meanings between “yes” and “no” [1], on the other hand, an extremely broad interpretation of modality is seen as the expression of the speaker’s attitude to reality, to the environment and language, which includes emotive attitude, speaker’s reactions (ethical, emotional, volitional) and the attitude of the speaker to task orientation of verbal communication. Any statement is accompanied by its assessment because any utterance not only contains information but also expresses the speaker's attitude to the message. In addition, it is an indicator of emotive attitude to the events described in an utterance. There is no doubt that in modern linguistics the scope of the term “modality” has been significantly expanded covering essentially any communicative mode. It is often referred to as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon of the subjective-objective nature. Objective modality gives the description of the action itself, whereas subjective modality provides additional modal meanings and shades. When considering the category of modality on the level of the text, it becomes apparent that extralinguistic factors influence the implementation and differentiation of modal notions. It is also important to study the effect of the elements of context to determine the modal background and the role of the context in the implementation of the modal meanings. As a result, modal meanings will be different depending on contexts [2].

Thus, the concept of linguistic category of modality has developed toward expanding the definition of this category, from the modality of the verb (as the word) to the modality of the text. In this study we have considered the examples of “should infinitive” constructions used in Ernest Hemingway’s “For Whom the Bell Tolls” [3] and Emily Bronte’s “Wuthering Heights” [4]. The choice of the literary sources has been determined by the following factors: 1) high degree of emotiveness of the content; 2) a great number of translations.

2. THE MODAL MEANINGS OF “SHOULD INFINITIVE” CONSTRUCTION AND FACTORS DEFINING THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

In modern linguistics much priority has been given to the study of the meanings of the verb “should” but still there are no absolute criteria for the implementation of its modal meanings in the context. The verb “should” is considered to be a problematic verb since it is difficult to identify its central meaning. Generally, the main meanings of the verb “should” are as follows: obligation or logical necessity, advisability, desirability and supposition. Though, there is a point of view that such meanings as advisability, supposition and desirability have originated from the meaning of obligation. Therefore all these meanings are closely connected and express lexical meanings of the modal “should” itself. As a result, they are difficult to differentiate without taking into consideration the fact that the “should infinitive” construction may acquire a particular notion or its shade under the influence of the context.

3. THE MEANING OF OBLIGATION.

As a rule, the verb “should” with the meaning of obligation occurs in simple sentences, e.g.:

“I have a boredom in these mountains. We should go.” [3:77]. But it is difficult to differentiate the meanings of obligation and supposition on the level of a sentence because the implementation of the meaning of obligation largely depends on the inner context. Let’s consider the following example: “We should go. And since we must win to survive ultimately, it is necessary that the bridges must be blown”. [3:126]. Such lexical elements as the verb “must” and the modal expression “it is necessary” predetermine the realization of the meaning of obligation.

Different factors influence the implementation of the modal meaning of obligation as well. They can be specified using the following example: “And should I always be sitting with you?” she demanded, growing more irritated. [4:71] The first factor is the contextual one. A young woman, Cathy, is talking to a young man, Heathcliff, who is in love with her. The next factor is the social one. Cathy is a daughter of a wealthy man whereas Heathcliff is an orphan. Cathy thinks that her marriage with a rich man, Linton, could help Heathcliff to benefit from it. She says: “If I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise” [4:83]. Then, there is a situational factor. When Heathcliff says: “You never told me before that you disliked my company, Cathy!” [4:71], she replies “It’s no company at all” [4:71]. Finally, Cathy addresses Heathcliff with the questions: “And should I always be sitting with you? What good do I get? What do you talk about?” [4:71]. All these factors influence the formation of the modality of obligation and must be taken into account while translating the construction with “should”.

So, the verb “should” with the meaning of obligation can often be used in simple sentences. Since the meaning of obligation is very close to those of advice and supposition, it is necessary to take into consideration the various extralinguistic factors, e.g. contextual, social, situational ones, while translating the “should infinitive” construction into other languages. A large concentration of the elements with similar meanings (modal verb “must”, modal expressions “it is necessary” etc.) can also determine the implementation of the meaning of obligation.

4. THE MEANING OF ADVICE/ADVISABILITY.

The meaning of advice/advisability of the verb “should” is very close to the meaning of obligation therefore it can be difficult to find difference in them. Since advice is an address to someone, the sentence structure is typical where the subject of the sentence is represented by the subject “you”. One of the most important factors that has the influence on the realization of the meaning of advice or advisability is the social factor.

“You shouldn’t lie till ten. There’s the very prime of the morning gone long before that time.” [4:64]. The form “shouldn’t” indicates negative advice, moreover the social factor enforces this meaning. These words are said by a servant to her master. Naturally, it can not be regarded as prohibition or obligation because of the servant’s social status. If a translator does not take into consideration the social factor and translates this form as prohibition, the reader will come to the

wrong conclusion that the master has weak character and has to obey the servant. As a result, the interpretation of the whole situation can be wrong and the context may be distorted.

In the following example the meaning of advice is neutralized under the influence of the context and the meaning of obligation predominates: "Hindley lavished on her a torrent of scornful abuse, and bade her get to her room immediately, or she shouldn't cry for nothing!" [4:89]. When viewed apart from the context, the sentence with "shouldn't" might be regarded as negative advice. The following factors must be taken into account while translating the sentence:

- a) Contextual factor. Catherine is in the house where everyone hates her.
- b) Social factor. Hindley is not properly educated and has no idea how to treat a woman according to etiquette.
- c) Age-related factor. Catherine and Hindley are approximately of the same age, therefore he admits mandative tone.
- d) Situational factor. Hindley is drunk and does not care what expressions to choose.

As can be seen from above, the meaning of advice/advisability is mainly determined by the context. If any of the above-mentioned extralinguistic factors is ignored, it can lead to the wrong translation and even distort the original meaning.

Having analyzed the examples of the "should + infinitive" constructions in speech and written texts, it is possible to make the conclusion that the above-mentioned construction mainly possesses the meaning of obligation in those cases when "should" is followed by a subjective infinitive, that is the infinitive whose action is performed by the subject of the sentence and depends on the subject's will. Consider the following example: "Come to the glass, and I'll let you see what you should wish." [4:59]. The verb "wish" shows the action conducted by the subject of the sentence, moreover, it also depends on the speaker's will. Therefore, the verb "should" in the combination with this particular infinitive definitely implements the meaning of obligation.

5. THE MEANING OF DESIRABILITY.

There are controversial views in the linguistic literature whether the verb "should" conveys the meaning of desirability or not. Some scientists do not specify this meaning [5] whereas some of them regard it as the shade of the meaning of obligation. G. Leech considers that one of the ways to learn about somebody's desire is to ask a question using "should", which sounds weaker than a question with "shall": "Should we tell him that he's not wanted?" [6]. At the same time, having studied a great number of examples, we can come to conclusion that the implementation of the meaning of desirability may be realized in the process of the construction's functioning in the text under the influence of various factors in the mode of subjective modality. The availability of particular vocabulary, e.g. the verb "to wish", intensifies the meaning of desirability of the given construction. "The two of you can speak of what you wish". "Then the afternoon should come". [3:162]. The fact that the modal meaning of desirability in the second sentence is influenced by the verb "to wish" in the first one should be taken into consideration while translating it into a foreign language to convey the shade of this meaning.

Among other factors influencing the meaning of desirability is the usage of the above-mentioned construction in negative sentences. "He guesses we shouldn't wait for him till this late hour" [4:87]. Furthermore, the modal meaning of desirability may be implemented in the context. "I'll be miserable all night, and I shouldn't be miserable for you!" [4:73]. These words are spoken by the girl who is difficult to persuade and sensitive only to her own desires. The given context has created the conditions for subjective modality of desirability to be implemented.

While expressing our own wishes or asking about somebody else's wishes it is possible to make them sound more tactful using the phrase "should like/prefer" [6]. "I beg pardon for asking; but I should like to hear how she is!" [4:38]. Under the influence of the phrase "I beg pardon" the construction "should like" acquires the notion of request, which is intensified by the context – a servant addresses her master.

To sum up, the modal meaning of desirability may be implemented under the influence of the similar lexical elements in the context. In general, this modal meaning is realized in negative sentences.

6. THE MODAL MEANING OF SUPPOSITION.

Modern linguists share the opinion that the modal meaning of supposition is characteristic of the verb “should” [6]. The implementation of the given meaning may be fulfilled under the influence of the verb “might” or modal words and expressions having the similar meaning, e.g. possibly, probably, maybe, perhaps, to be possible, to be likely etc., used together in a sentence with the verb “should”. Consequently, the verb “should” may be viewed as the equivalent of the stronger verb “must”.

Let’s consider the following example. “Probably Golz knew all about this too and wanted to make the point that you must make your whole life in the two nights that are given to you; that living as we do now you must concentrate all of that which you should always have into the short time that you can have it”. [3:201]. The modal meaning of supposition is intensified by the word “probably” at the beginning of the sentence. Moreover, the modal words and expressions may be used in a broader context and influence the implementation of supposition. “Perhaps you and me should be shot too. It is possible”, the General laughed. “Don’t suggest it though”. [3:388]. The phrase “should be shot” acquires the modal meaning of supposition being influenced by the semantic meaning of the words “perhaps”, “possible” and “suggest”. It may be also illustrated in the following example: “Superstition urged me to comply with this impulse: supposing he should be dead! I thought – or should die soon! – supposing it were a sign of death!” [4:109]. The verb “suppose”, the phrase “I thought” and the form “it were” contribute to the realization of subjective modality of supposition of the verb “should”.

Thus, the modal meaning of supposition may be implemented under the influence of modal words (perhaps, possibly, maybe, etc.), modal verbs (might) and modal expressions (to be possible, to be likely, etc.) that can be used not only in the sentence with “should” but also in the surrounding context. The interrogative structure of a sentence is characteristic of the sentences with the meaning of supposition. Although the verb “should” has the meaning of supposition, it is generally implemented in a broad context.

7. THE MEANINGS OF REALITY/UNREALITY.

Expressing unreality is another complicated issue regarding the “should Infinitive” construction. In the communication process there are various situations when the speaker has to talk not only about the events taking place in real life, but on their basis talk about the unreality of a specific action. Therefore, the human mind is capable of abstracting and building various kinds of conclusions that reflect not only the facts of reality, but also events that are contrary to it, that is unreal ones. In the context of the past the formal differences between the indicative future tense indicating real future and subjunctive expressing unreal action disappear. Consider the example of this phenomenon with the modal verb “should”. In the context of the past, there is one form of “should infinitive” to express both real and unreal actions related to the future. Thus, in the English language in the context of the past there is no clear formal distinction between a real and unreal action if it relates to the future.

The homonymy of “should infinitive” construction is removed in the context. The reality of action of this construction may be due to several factors:

- a) The availability of time indicators of the future tense;
- b) The influence of the speech situation (extralinguistic context);
- c) Contrasting the given construction and the past form.

The analysis of the two parts of the sentence in expressing unreality in the English language has shown that it is possible to divide them into two groups. The first group includes sentences which show the speaker’s attitude to what is reported in the main clause, while the description of the

unreal events is given in the subordinate clause. This form presents Suppositional Mood, and the context expresses the meaning of unreality. There are words of specific meanings which indicate that the events presented in the subordinate clause are unreal in the sentences of the first type. They are usually the words of motivation and desire such as: demand, insist, require, suggest, propose, etc. and the nouns derived from them; adjectives: essential, disgraceful, important, impossible, vital, incredible, incomprehensible, intolerable, terrible etc. The second group includes sentences that offer both of the components involved in conveying unreality. In other words, both the main clause and subordinate clause of the sentences of the second type describe unreal events which have a causal relationship on the semantic level.

The dividing line between the real future and unreal future is really very fine. It has been shown that the degree of reality of action in each case is not determined by the grammatical form (because of its homonymy) but largely depends on a variety of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. The linguistic factors are presented by the context and its components that contribute to the realization of the meanings of reality / unreality. The extralinguistic factors mean a pragmatic aspect, i.e. the communication plan, knowledge of customs, traditions and culture of the people. Therefore, translating sentences with the homonymous structure, the pragmatic aspect must be taken into account. If homonymy is not removed, then the meaning of reality / unreality in the pragmatic terms is irrelevant. In this sense, real and unreal future do not exclude but complement each other and are virtually impossible to distinguish. Future Tense viewed from the perspective of the past separates an action from the moment of its possible implementation. Nonetheless, if the conditional clause is unreal, the whole sentence bears the unreal meaning as well: "If I were in heaven, I should be extremely miserable" [4:81] or "I should only pity him – hate him, perhaps, if he were ugly and a clown" [4:80]. In these two examples the unreal condition "if I were" or "if he were" undoubtedly indicates unreality of the whole sentences.

Thus, the grammatical meanings of reality / unreality in the future in English are expressed implicitly and are irrelevant in terms of communication.

8. THE EMOTIVE AND EXPRESSIVE MEANINGS.

In linguistic literature there is no single point of view on the inclusion of emotive and expressive meanings in the category of modality. However, since the category of modality is subjective, it may include emotive and expressive means of conveying a speaker's attitude to the content of an utterance. As a result, the category of modality is interrelated with various kinds and types of expressing emotions, for example, indignation, admiration, threats, etc. In the process of communication people express emotions and their attitude to what is said. Consequently, the purpose of communication is not only to render information but also express a speaker's emotions.

The presence of emotive and expressive means can be caused by various factors, which can be seen in the following example: "No!" thundered Earnshaw, "should he offer to leave me, he's a dead man" [4:139]. The exclamation mark, the semantics of the verb "to thunder" and the inversion in the sentence supplement the basic meaning of "should offer" with emotive undertones. So, the implementation of emotive and expressive meanings occurs under the influence of the structure of a sentence. The inversion of the verb should is called hypothetical usage of should [6].

Additional emotive notions may be realized due to the grammatical repetition that renders significant information on emotiveness and expressiveness. Let's take the following example:

I never say to him, "Let this or that enemy alone, because it would be ungenerous or cruel to harm them", I say, "Let them alone, because I should hate them to be wronged" [4:103].

The emotive impact is intensified by repeating the words "say", "let alone", "because", the pronoun I written by the author in italics. In addition to that, emotive meanings may be rendered in interrogative sentences, such as rhetorical questions "Why should I?" or "Why should not you?":

"I want to know what I should do" [4:79]. The rhetorical question is used to express the emotional state of the speaker that may be shown by an exclamation mark in the translation into a foreign language. The modal "should" is also used in subordinate clauses following the expressions of surprise, annoyance, regret, etc.). The emotive meanings of admiration, astonishment,

indignation, etc. used in the given constructions emphasize the personal attitude of the subject to the facts described in the sentence. “I’m annoyed that I should dream of chattering on at such a rate!” [4:70]. The emotional notion of the sentence is illustrated with the phrase expressing annoyance and exclamatory intonation.

Another indicator of emotiveness is the usage of “that” in the sentences with “should”: “That they should let us do something on paper. That we should conceive and execute something on paper” [3:184]. The context also contributes to the emotional situation of tension – the soldiers are experiencing the feeling of indignant anger because they have to obey silly orders.

So, it can be seen from the examples, the implementation of modal emotional meanings is influenced by such factors as inversion, repetition, exclamatory or question intonation. It should be noted that the punctuation is also one of the most important factors contributing to the realization of modal emotive and expressive meanings.

9. CONCLUSIONS

A wide variety of views on major issues concerning the category of modality and its relation to other linguistic categories demonstrates the complexity of the category. Modality in the context is understood as a multifaceted heterogeneous category which includes both objective and subjective aspects. Having studied the functioning of “should infinitive” construction in the texts, we have concluded that the given construction may be used to express different modal meanings such as obligation, advice/advisability, desirability/wish and supposition. It also acquires different shades of these meanings in the context. The implementation of the modal notions results from the interaction of the “should infinitive” construction with other elements of a sentence in broad linguistic and extralinguistic context. The modal notions may be intensified by the following factors:

- 1) Lexical elements of broad context, e.g. modal verbs, modal words or modal expressions;
- 2) Syntactical repetition;
- 3) Type of a sentence;
- 4) Extra linguistic context.

The implementation of emotive and expressive modal meanings of the given construction occurs under the influence of the following factors:

- 1) Intonation;
- 2) Repetition;
- 3) Inversion;
- 4) Interrogative structure of a sentence.

The modal notions of the verb “should” do not always occur on the surface level of a sentence but they may be inferred on the semantic level in the context. In the English texts different modal meanings are often expressed implicitly. The study has also found that under the influence of the context and its factors the modal “should” may acquire a broader spectrum of modal notions, e.g. request, order, intention, hope etc. So, the modal meanings of the “should infinitive” construction are to be considered in the mode of subjective modality.

References

- [1] M.A.K. Halliday, C.M.I.M. Matthiessen, *An introduction to Functional Grammar*, third ed., Arnold, London, 2004.
- [2] M. Lewis, *The English Verb: An Exploration of Structure and Meaning*, first ed., Hove: LTP, 1986.
- [3] E. Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1981.
- [4] E. Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*, Airmont Books, New York, 1973.
- [5] R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech and J. Svartvik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Longman, London, 1985.
- [6] G. Leech and J. Svartvik, *A Communicative Grammar of English*, third ed., Longman, London, 2002.